Martin Mickelson 7570 Valley Ford Road as told to Maxine Kortum Durney, October 23 1989, and January 24 1990.

Maxine: I began the conversation by asking Martin if he had known my father, Max Kortum.

Martin: Yes, I did. Max, who was selling feed for Sperry Flour [the Petaluma dealer was G. P.McNear] would come out to Martin Iversen's, my brother-in law, who lived on Bodega Highway, on the left, beyond Walker Road. Bransens were across the highway. Martin had 5000 chickens in colony houses, and I was his hired man.

All the companies at that time had salesmen, and that's what the salesmen did, drove up the road and stopped at every place. Sperry was a good feed. Later when I worked for Two Rock Commercial Company, we sold lumber, coal, and Sperry feed. I used to haul it from Santa Rosa, where Sperry had a warehouse.

Martin Iversen bought his feed in Petaluma, from Coulson Company, across the street from Hill Plaza park.

Two Rock Commercial was owned by Charlie Garrison. His wife's brother, Morris Thomas, and Dick Moore worked there. Charlie and Dick were married to Morris Thomas's sisters, Grey Garrison and Madge Moore. Grey was 25 years younger than her husband Charles. They all came from Missouri. Charlie Garrison was born in the Shenandoah Valley.

When I first came here from Wisconsin, in 1921, when I was 20, people used coal to heat brooder houses. You can still see the brick chimneys on some old brooder houses on Middle Two Rock Road, the Beggs place. Later, in the 1920's, electricity replaced coal.

At Two Rock Commercial we would get carloads of coal, gondolas filled overflowing with anthracite from Arizona. The pieces were small and very hard. We called it nut coal. There were probably 20 tons to a car.

The sides of the car were 3 or 4 feet high. We'd get into the car, shovel the coal into a sack, tie the sack, and hand it down to someone who would weigh it on a scale. 100 pounds to a sack.

It was a dirty job. When we got home there would be a hot bath, water heated in pipes from the wood stove.

At that time people raised their chickens on free range, and housed them in colony houses, where the birds could come in at night. It was thought that the wind and fresh air out here was healthy. The hatcheries wanted eggs from free range chickens and everyone around Two Rock sold hatching eggs.

When I worked for my brother-in-law, Martin Iversen, his chickens were in colony houses....which have no floors but have

runners so that they can be pulled from place to place. When he moved up to his new farm we moved the colony houses with the chickens in them.

This is how we did it: During the day, when the chickens were outside, we would build temporary floors in the colony houses. When the birds came in at night we closed the doors. Then that night we would hitch a team to a house and pull it across the road, across Bransens, and up and over to his new place (now owned by Del Curto). We would move a colony, 8 or ten houses a night, 75 to 100 chickens per house.

This was the spring of 1922 or '23.

I married Annie McCannon in 1927. We purchased this place...5 acres... from Frank Denman, and the deed to our place had his name on it as welll as eight or ten McNears. We had no water here, so I bought a lot from Nissen, to which I then needed title. Frank Denman, then in his nineties, surveyed the place for me.

Dick Moore purchased 5 acres here as well, then later acquired a second place, and sold his 5 to me. About 1943 I bought 50 acres back of me, again from Frank Denman.

We moved here in 1929. There was nothing here. We planted the cypress trees to keep the wind off our living quarters. Not gum trees, because you can't grow anything under gum trees. The cypress trees came in boxes. The redwoods came from Fort Bragg, where Union Lumber Co had a reforestation program. A driver brought me little two inch trees in a package I could hold in my hand, in 1935. Now those redwoods are over 100 feet high.

I was still working away from the ranch, for Two Rock Commercial, and then in an auto repair shop I established in Two Rock.

After awhile I built a brooder house, then colony houses. Had to try to make a living the best way we could.

We would cut all the lumber for our buildings down at Two Rock Commercial in the mill there. My colony houses were 6 by 12 feet. Rough lumber, 1x 10 redwood, were cut 5 ft long for sides. Runners were 2 by 8's 14 ft long so we could slope them. A hole in the runner to put a chain through to move them. For the roof we used 1 by 4 tongue and groove redwood. Cut about 4'long. We had 2 by 3's to support the 1 by 4's, which were layed vertically. Earlier they had used shakes. Those houses that didn't have a floor had a 2 by 4 at each end.

Roosts were the entire length, 2 by 2's, not nailed to side of house, but held in slots. We turned them over each month because they would start to bend in the middle with the weight of the birds.

The rest of the building was all put together with nails.

When I needed colony houses I'd get the lumber, pile it in the back yard, and then the neighbors would come on a Sunday morning, and we would build 10 or 12 in a day. There'd be a pot of stew. We'd be quite a crew, six or eight of us.

We never hired anyone. We always helped each other.

For each colony of eight or ten houses we had two laying houses. These had floors to keep the chickens cleaner, and therefore the eggs cleaner. There were nests along both sides, one above the other.

Chickens like to lay eggs in the dark, and they would go in a little trap door into these laying houses. There was a big door for us to enter to gather eggs, but that door was closed during the day. The hens are looking for a secluded place, and the only light was from the trap door. Hens lay in the morning, and when we had gathered the eggs we closed the trap door so they couldn't go in to roost for the night.

No, we didn't have chickens stealing nests in the weeds. There were no weeds, the cows took care of that.

We had a big twenty gallon boiler, built up on bricks, to cook feed for the chickens. Heated with a wood fire, everyone had eucalyptus, you know. We did this daily. We cooked in the afternoon, and it was still warm the next morning when we mixed it with mash to feed in big troughs on the ground. We cooked what was available...potatoes, herring, horse meat, soy beans. In the morning we picked and chopped kale to add to the mixture.

The potatoes were all culls, small. The herring....years ago there was an awful lot of herring in Tomales Bay in winter. Fishermen came around to bring us a couple of buckets of herring every day, at one cent a pound. A lot of people used horsemeat, which came already ground. We would add milk if we had it. All mixed with a shovel, no power mixers then.

The potatoes we used were rejects from the potatoes brought into Two Rock from the farms around here. Most of the potatoes we raised in Two Rock were sent to the Hawaiian Islands as seed potatoes. These were "certified", that is, they had been immersed in 110 degree water, to kill a bug that we called the "eel worm". The eel worm burrowed into the potato, and it was that worm that eventually killed the industry around here. The certified potatoes were only sold for seed, and they were a size we called "craters", egg to lemon size. Smaller potatoes were used for chicken feed, and the biggest ones were sold for human consumption. Out here we raised British Queens, a good baking potatoe.

There were dairies and sheep, but everyone also had a brooder house and chickens, perhaps only a thousand chickens, but everyone had them.

Colony houses were what we mostly had out here on what we called "the coast". We all raised chickens to lay eggs for the hatcheries. We didn't get too many eggs in the winter, but in the spring the laying began and the hatchery season began.

We bought chicks from Hardin Hatchery, one day old chicks, all White Leghorns, special birds from their breeding stock. We would try to get a batch of chicks in January, expecting them when they were fifteen months old, to be ready to produce hatching eggs for the hatching season - that would be spring of the following year. Then the hatcheries would supply the roosters, one to one hundred birds. During the war there was such a demand for meat birds, broilers, that the hatcheries furnished Rhode Island Red roosters... a better eating bird, but a bird that seemed to be susceptible to diseases.

The hens started to lay at five or six months and these eggs we sold to Poultry Producers. The birds had to be fifteen months old before the hatcheries would take their eggs. The hens lay perhaps 100 to 150 eggs per year and we'd get pretty good production in the spring. We would keep the laying hens about three years then sell the whole flock for meat birds in the season when they were't laying much; then start again with pullets we'd raised from chicks started fifteen months before.

I always sold to Hardin Hatchery, they came out twice a week to pick up eggs. They paid 11 cents a dozen above the market price. Their hatchery was a nice big brick building, that later burned down, where the Petaluma police station is now. Clarence Hardin, whose wife was a Stegeman, ran the hatchery.

They came once a year to blood test, because all chickens were blood tested if they were producing eggs for the hatcheries.

We were still using colony houses . We'd go up and close the doors to the houses after the chickens had gone to roost, and then do the testing early in the morning. They were looking for pullorum. We never had much trouble with it...might lose a dozen out of a whole flock. The birds that tested positive were sold to market. If a flock went to 50% they'd shut down the whole flock for hatching eggs. But the eggs could be sold for eating.

John Kelly, head field man for Hardin, would bring a crew of men out. We vaccinated for pox and bronchitis. Dr. Dungen, a veterinarian and pathologist, who worked for the state laboratory on F street, looked at our chickens when we were having trouble.

We bought medicine from the Davis chicken pharmacy.

We kept down the mites by spraying the colony houses with diesel oil and chrysallic [sp?] acid. We had a pump that went with a five gallon bucket. The pump was called a stirrup pump because it had a piece on it shaped like a stirrup that went to the floor that you put your foot on to hold it steady.

I remember when the war [World War II] started, the man who worked for Praetzel who sold us the diesel said the price was going up. I contracted for a thousand gallons at ~~$0.00~~ 64 a gallon.

For lice we would put DDT in the nests.

We eventually went to bigger houses because it was easier to care for the chickens. They could be fed in the house, which kept them cleaner, and then the eggs were cleaner, and when it rained real hard the chickens just stayed on the roosts.

At first the hatcheries were not convinced that we should go to bigger houses. They liked the idea of the colony houses that were moved around to fresh ground and the chickens on free range.

I started building my large houses in 1940. After the war started the demand for eggs went up. I had six large houses, with 1000 chickens to each one.

We had no lights in the houses for years, because the hatcheries were afraid that the eggs wouldn't hatch if the hens were forced with lights. Eventually we went to lights just in the morning, about 1950.

Its natural for hens to lay eggs when they think the day is longer. If you can make spring come a couple of months earlier you were that much ahead of the game.

The hatcheries specified we should feed the birds corn. We fed "scratch" in the afternoon, corn, wheat, barley, milo, and oats. The chickens always ate the corn first.

Corn was hard to get during the war, and higher priced. Wheat was reasonable, $1.60 or $1.70 a hundred pounds, very reasonable compared to corn. Boyd Roerden was working for McNears when Hitler invaded Poland in September of 1939. He came out and said "War started in Europe, this morning. The price of wheat is going to go up. I can sell you wheat at $1.55 a hundred pounds." The price was for carload lots, and there were 20 tons to a carload. McNears received it in bulk, and sacked it. I had my own trucks.

We didn't start to get bulk feed until '56 or '57.

Before the war we sold hatchery eggs only in the spring, but during the war people could make money by raising and selling meat birds...not just eggs... to the market. This meant that the hatchery bought eggs from us all year round so they could provide chicks for the farmers who wanted to raise broilers all year round. A lot of people made money during the war raising broilers. The birds were kept in the houses, and fed there.

When I sold my hens in 1956, I didn't want to go to cage birds as others did. Thomas Nelson, who was working for Poehlmann Hatchery, came around to ask me if I wanted to raise pullets for cage

plants. "I think I can get you the contract to raise pullets for Burmester [Ernie] and Ribley". They were producing eggs on Petaluma Hill Road across from where the college is now, from hens in cages.

Poehlmann furnished me with the chicks and feed in the beginning. I made my hen houses into brooder houses, kept the chicks in the brooder house 10 or 11 weeks, then transferred them into growing houses till they were 5 months. Then they went to Burmester and Ribley.

I raised 10,000 every 3 months. I guess I raised millions. Later we sold to plants in Morgan Hill and Santa Cruz.

A lot of chicken ranches kept going by raising birds for cages. That was something, all the vaccinations that were required, including corrhiza in the last years. Ernie Burmester used to come out to vaccinate for corrhiza. He was brother to Ben whose career was spent in research in poultry disease.

I retired in 1962, and leased my land as pasture for beef animals.

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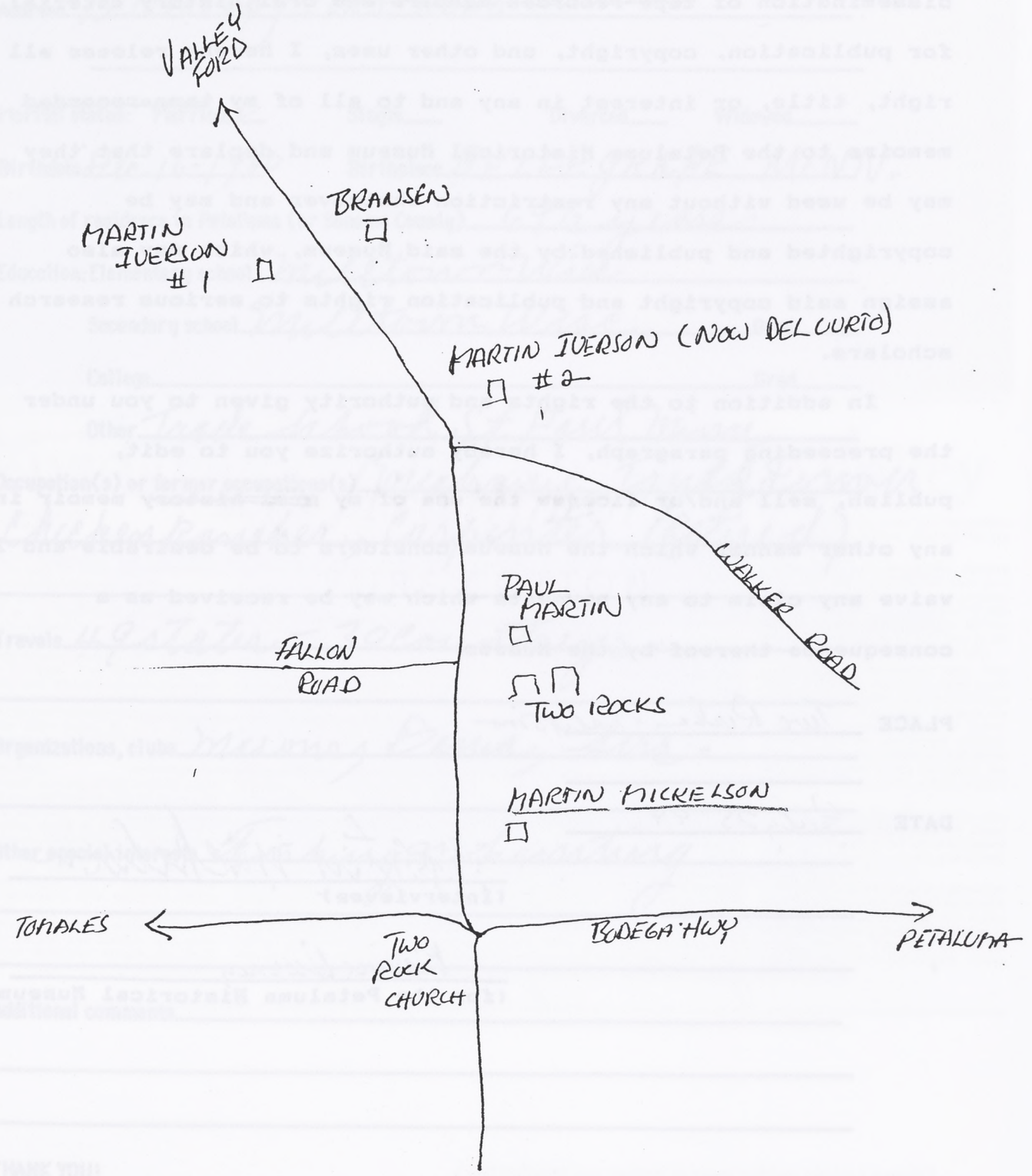
VALLEY FORD
BRANSEN
MARTIN IVERSON #1
MARTIN IVERSON (NOW DELCURTO) #2
WALKER ROAD
PAUL MARTIN
FALLON ROAD
TWO ROCKS
MARTIN NICKELSON
TOMALES
TWO ROCK CHURCH
BODEGA HWY
PETALUMA

PETALUMA HISTORICAL MUSEUM
Oral History Program

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For and in consideration of the participation by the Petaluma Historical Museum in any programs involving the dissemination of ~~tape-recorded memoirs and~~ oral history material for publication, copyright, and other uses, I hereby release all right, title, or interest in any and to all of my ~~tape-recorded~~ memoirs to the Petaluma Historical Museum and declare that they may be used without any restriction whatsoever and may be copyrighted and published by the said Museum, which may also assign said copyright and publication rights to serious research scholars.

In addition to the rights and authority given to you under the preceeding paragraph, I hereby authorize you to edit, publish, sell and/or license the use of my ~~oral history~~ memoir in any other manner which the Museum considers to be desirable and I waive any claim to any payments which may be received as a consequence thereof by the Museum.

PLACE Two Rock California

DATE July 25 '94

Martin McPherson
(Interviewee)

Patricia Duncan
(for the Petaluma Historical Museum)

PETALUMA HISTORICAL LIBRARY AND MUSEUM
Oral History Program
Narrator Personal Information Questionnaire

Name MICKELSON MARTIN ELDOR
Last First Middle (Maiden)

Address 7570 VALLEY FORD ROAD

Marital status: Married ✓ Single ___ Divorced ___ Widowed ___

Birthdate Dec 16-1900 Birthplace BELLEGRADE MINN.

Length of residence in Petaluma (or Sonoma County) 69½ years

Education: Elementary school Milltown Wisc

Secondary school Milltown Wisc. Grad ___

College ___ Grad ___

Other Trade School St. Paul Minn

Occupation(s) or former occupations(s) Mechanic, Truck Driver
Chicken Rancher, Carpenter (Retired)

Travels 49 States - 30 Countries

Organizations, clubs Masons, Davis, Lions.

Other special interests Fishing & hunting

Additional comments

THANK YOU!

PETALUMA HISTORICAL LIBRARY AND MUSEUM
Oral History Program
Family History Questionnaire

	Name	Birthdate	Birthplace	Deceased? Date
Parents*	Jens Michael Mickelson	1860	Denmark	1943
	Marion Helena Troelstrup	Dec 16, 1863	Peter Miami	1958
Brothers & Sisters	Hannah 1885, Mattie 1887, Clarence 1889, Fred 1893			
	Jennie 1895, Arnold 1898 Cyrus 1903			
Grandparents*	Christian Mickelson	Born Feb 2 1833	Denmark	Died 1921
	Metamaria Jensen	Born July 4 1839	Denmark	Died 1916
	Jens Troelstrup	Born Nov 11, 1812	Denmark	Died 1891
	Johanna Holmberg	Born Dec 4-1824	Smaland Sweden	died 1908
	Frieda Bostrom	born May 2-1914	Petaluma Ca	
Spouse	Annie McCammon	Born Nov 27-1909	Fallon Ca	died Dec 11-1962
Children	Elden Robert	Born Apr 1-1930	Petaluma Ca	
Grandchildren	Michael	Born Sept 15-1957		
	James	Born Jan 31-1958		
	Terry	Born Feb 17-1959		
	Gary	Born May 15-1960		

*Please include maiden name of mother and grandmothers.

THANK YOU!

Press Democrat
4-1-90

MARK ARONOFF/PRESS DEMOCRAT

Martin Mickelson has lived in Two Rock Valley for the past 69 years. He's written a booklet on the history of the area.

Vivid memories of Two Rock Valley

Author writes lively history of area

By JANET PARMER
Press Democrat Bureau

Martin Mickelson has vivid memories of potato farming on his Two Rock property, with the help of "potato diggers" recruited from a nearby hobo encampment.

For the past 69 years, Mickelson has lived in the Two Rock Valley, and he clearly recollects much of the history in a 26-page booklet he's written about the area.

With chapter headings like "California Here We Come," "Two Rock Church," and "Social Life," Mickelson, 89, has recounted with rich detail daily life in the agricultural valley west of Petaluma. Inspiration for the project came during his 80th birthday party while reminiscing with some friends. They realized no one had written a history of Two Rock.

"I doubt very much that it will be a best seller or even be in the top 10, but it may be the only book written about Two Rock this year, which at least will be some distinction," Mickelson wrote in one chapter.

He had written short stories about deep-sea fishing trips in Mexico, but this was Mickelson's most ambitious writing project.

Although he makes mention of early Indian settlers and Spanish land grant ranchers, Mickelson's memoirs deal mostly with events starting in the early 1920s.

At that time, the tiny town of Two Rock had a population of 22, and the eight families in the valley were closely knit and often shared business ventures.

Mickelson came to Two Rock from Wisconsin after his older sister, Hannah, wrote to her family bemoaning the loss of their "hired man," who helped with farming chores. Mickelson persuaded her that he could handle the work, and made the 26-day trip west in a Dodge touring car.

His first impressions of Two Rock in mid-August 1921 were far from favorable. "The hills were all brown and the cold west wind blew every afternoon. If I had the money, I think I would have returned to Wisconsin, but fortunately I did not have it," he wrote.

For 18 years, Mickelson worked as a lumber hauler for the Two Rock Commercial Co. and delivered North Coast wood to most of the ranches between Point Reyes and Jenner. Like most of his Two Rock neighbors, he also grew potatoes, hay and raised chickens on his property for additional income.

Mickelson and other farmers employed "potato diggers" on a seasonal basis to help with potato cultivation, weeding and harvesting.

He writes that during the 1920s and 1930s, there was a large "hobo jungle" in Two Rock. Some of the men stayed year-round, while others were migrant laborers who traveled the state, picking fruit and vegetable crops.

"The farmers would come and pick up as many as they needed, and they would unusually take all their belongings with them and camp on the place where they worked. Most of them had their own pet shovel to dig with," Mickelson recounted. "They received seven cents a sack for digging and picking. They did their own cooking, which consisted mostly of boiled potatoes."

He mentions by name, "Hieroglyphics," a man who had been to Mexico and talked incessantly about the rock drawings he saw there.

Another hobo was called the "Remittance Man," because it was rumored that he got a pension from English relatives. "Johnnie Behind the Rock" didn't associate with the rest and camped next to a rock behind the lumber mill.

Two events led to the demise of Two Rock's hobo population, according to Mickelson. The potato crop became infested with disease and most farmers stopped cultivating them, and the government began a welfare program for the unemployed.

Mickelson continued chicken farming until 1963, and then went to work as a carpenter on local construction projects, He retired in 1973, the same year he sold his 60 acres of land. He has lifetime tenancy on the property, and lives in the Valley Ford Road house he built in 1929.

According to Mickelson's book, Two Rock traditionally has had a lively social network, with residents involved in Grange activities, the Two Rock Presbyterian Church, the Catholic Church in nearby Tomales and the Bloomfield Masonic Lodge. Additionally, Mickelson and others have participated in the volunteer fire department and on public school committees.

Mickelson and his wife, Frieda, stay busy now maintaining a bountiful flower and vegetable garden. He still has a passion for fishing, and twice a month goes salmon fishing in the Pacific Ocean.

The years have barely slowed Mickelson down, and he manages to travel frequently. He's proud of the fact that he's visited every state except Vermont and been to 31 foreign countries. This May, he and his wife will leave on a nine-country, 15-day overseas cruise.